

[Memo from Charles Seeger to Harold Spivacke, October 7, 1939]

11 Copy for Dr Spivacke

MEMORANDUM

October 7, 1939

TO: Dr. Harold Spivacke, Chief, Music Division, Library of Congress

FROM: Charles Seeger

I have received from you informally, with request for comment, the letter dated October 2, of Mrs. Carita Doggett Corse, State Supervisor, Florida Statewide Writers' Project.

The "note" from me referred to at the end of the first paragraph of this letter must refer to a personal letter dated September 7 written to Mr. James R. Black, State Supervisor, Florida Statewide Music Project, Jacksonville, Florida. In this letter I gave Mr. Black a few reactions arrived at by Dr. Botkin and myself upon the first 16 records made by the collaboration of the Florida Writers' and Music Projects. I sent these off post haste in a private letter because both Dr. Botkin and I felt that the records as a whole were not giving us the best kind of material. I promised my friend Mr. Black that an official letter would follow. Pressure of business and the lack of an instrument upon which to play these records, which were cut at 33 R.P.M., has delayed the writing of this letter to Mr. Black, as at the time I knew would be the case. I marked a certain passage in the above letter as follows: "Until official suggestions are received you may quote this (section) to the workers, informally, of course." Later in the letter will be found the sentence underscored "It is just confidential to you".

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I give below the complete section referred to:

“The quotation from my ‘Some notes’ does not envisage more than a fifth or a fourth of the discs as spent upon giving title, name of performer, data about the song. It does not contemplate formal questioning by the interviewer or remarks by him about the performance. Where data of this sort has been successfully gathered, the questions have been quick, answers short and to the point. Most data has been given after, rather than before, the song. Data is never taken unless it is worth while — a valuable comment upon the song, dance, story or whatnot.

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“Dr. Botkin's remarks about ‘speaking as much as possible’ refers only to informants whose material is worth recording. The informant who indulges in a whole lot of trivia should either not be recorded at all or the cutting should be stopped (without letting him know). Above all, stuff that can be written just as well on paper should not be put on the record.

“A few words about recording. No considerable blank (uncut) portion of discs should remain unfilled. They cost 75 cents apiece. The sides should be numbered ‘A’ and ‘B’ as in commercial discs. Table of contents should appear on the paper cover, numbered A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, etc. A space should be left (1/16# or ##) between pieces. Speech may be recorded at 33 r.p.m. but music is better at 78. Recording speeds should be entered upon the envelope whenever (1) 33 r.p.m. is used, (2) whenever change back to 78 is made. Steadiness in revolution of the turntable is essential — it must be either 33 or 78 within a count or so.....”.

Mrs. Corse's report of my “note” needs no further comment. * * * * * You will, of course, make the necessary comments as requested in the last sentence of paragraph 1 of

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Mrs. Corse's letter. If you wish to inclose a word from me let it be to the effect that in my estimation record No. 16 is far in and away the best of the collection.